

"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the Church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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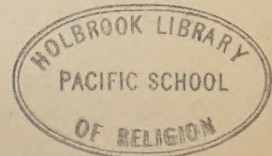
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Values

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The Archbishop of Canterbury said recently that modern developments have turned man into "an economic animal." What he meant was that the world in which we live has encouraged men to think only, or chiefly, of the securing of possessions. Man's chief end now seems to be either to make a living or to make a fortune. He does not take pleasure in his daily work, but only in the rewards for it. He is concerned primarily about "things," and only secondarily--or not at all--about values."

So far in this booklet, except in the preceding chapter, we seem to be guilty of this point of view, for we have been discussing economic matters at considerable length. But everything that has been said about economic matters has been said because economics has a great influence upon our way of life. Actually, it has been our rural way of life that we have had in the back of our minds all the time, and the motive behind all this discussion of prices and prosperity has been a concern for the preservation and improvement of our way of life.

But we have been talking chiefly about "things" and only incidentally about "values." We have been speaking almost as though man were "an economic animal," as though prices or economic prosperity were the only important thing in his life, and as though rural people couldn't be happy or fulfil their destiny unless they all become rich. If anyone has got the notion from what has been said so far that rural people can't be happy unless their economic lot is improved or that they are sure to be happy if it is improved, let him get rid of it now. Economic prosperity will not guarantee happiness. A fat bank account and a full stomach will not necessarily make a man happy. He was not made for these things. He is not an economic animal; he is a child of God, a spiritual being whom God made in His own image to have eternal fellowship with Himself. As the Shorter Catechism puts it: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." And man can only be truly happy--or blessed, as the Bible says (a much richer word)--as he fulfils this, his real destiny. "Man shall not live by bread alone," said Jesus, quoting from the Old Testament, "but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The worship of God must come first, and not the accumulation of possessions. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you."

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Within the past few years farmers have become more and more concerned about their economic condition and prospects, and there is the danger that they shall become economic animals. There is the danger that they shall put too much emphasis on the importance of economic matters, and forget the spiritual values which are created and nurtured by the life of worship. It is true that farmers have been driven to their concern about economic problems by their place in an increasingly industrialized and mechanized world; and it's a good thing they have begun to assert their rights and take steps to solve their problems. If our whole society had been more concerned to seek first the kingdom of God the farmers would never have been in the tragic plight from which they are now--we hope--emerging.

So this concern about economic problems is good, but there is danger lest we think there is nothing else to be seriously concerned about. Economic matters are the framework of life's building, and that is important, but spiritual values are its foundation, and that is even more important. Farmers must become concerned about those spiritual values.

What are these spiritual values about which ministers often talk so glibly--and obscurely? We may think of the Christian virtues and graces as being spiritual values. St. Paul calls these "the fruit of the Spirit," because they do not develop in a merely natural way and they are not created by purely human effort--they are inspired by God; they are the work of His Spirit in us. These, says St. Paul, are "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, loyalty, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22, 23.) These are all spiritual values, to be prized above rubies and sought after more than gold. But St. Paul did not intend to set forth a complete list, and the spiritual values with which we are concerned here are not in this list. There are two spiritual values which have, or ought to have, a special interest for rural people. They are Stewardship and Fellowship.

Spiritual Values: 1. Stewardship

Do you enjoy your work? I can hear somebody object that that is a senseless question, and that work is a curse; I can hear him quote the Bible and say: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread." Perhaps someone thinks I know nothing, or too little, of the drudgery of farm work, of the long hours in every sort of weather, of the never-ending routine, of the disappointments and heartbreaks, and then more than likely, after all one's work, a price that does not nearly meet the cost. But in spite of all that I still ask--Do you enjoy your work? And I mean--Do you not get some deep satisfaction out of creative work? The farmer's work is creative in the sense that he is producing, or helping to produce, new and living things. Do you not take pleasure in handling a beautiful apple fresh from the tree--or a fine potato, especially one you have grown yourself? Do you not admire a sleek and well-formed horse, or cow or pig? Or do you invariably think merely of what it's going to sell for? Are you truly interested in what you are doing or only in the reward for it? That's what I mean when I ask--Do you enjoy your work? When men get pleasure only out of the material reward of their work, and get no satisfaction out of working with God to bring living things into being, then they have become economic animals; they have lost their souls. The worst of it is that this is a condition created not so much by individual perversity as by the order in which we live. The farmer is driven by economic pressure to think only of the money value of his products. It is economic insecurity and pressure that are the curse of the farmer's life, not work. It is no great hardship for a normal man to earn his bread. But work is a curse when a man is a slave, when he can eat only in subservience to other people or to an unjust social order.

But, in spite of this condition of affairs, it is possible for the farmer to find real satisfaction in the dignity of his calling and to have a genuine appreciation

of the worthiness of what he does. This is one aspect of stewardship as it affects rural people: a true sense of their place in God's scheme of things. For a long time rural people have had an inferiority complex. They, as well as city folk, only too often look upon the hardship and simplicity (perhaps they call it "crudeness") of their life as indications of its inferiority to the more polished life of the city. But by what standard is the rural way of life judged to be inferior? Only by comparing the accidentals or externals is the city superior to the country. It is time rural people learned how to evaluate their way of life, to see it at its true worth, to realize that their calling is not second in dignity to any other, to be proud of their work and their place in society.

Farmers will have this sense of dignity if they realize that they are trustees, or as the Bible calls them, Stewards. This means two things: first, that farmers are God's agents for the cultivation and replenishing of the land. God calls them to make the earth fruitful. The land belongs to God; we need to interpret the first verse of Psalm 24 more literally than we usually do: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The land is not the absolute possession of any man or group of men; it belongs to God. This means that it must be kept for Him and utilized in accordance with His laws. The man who tills the soil is accountable to God for the way in which he does it. This is why one writer has said: "A man cannot be a good farmer unless he is a religious man."

Stewardship means, secondly, that farmers are the agents of society, and they have an obligation toward their fellow-men. We have said that the land really belongs to God, that it does not belong to men as an absolute possession to do with just as they please, but that they are under obligation to God for their use of it. It is also true that no individual holds his land as an absolute possession. There is what is known as Eminent Domain, which is the supreme power and right of the State over all property. The State has the right to expropriate any property for the welfare of the nation as a whole. This is no new law; it is as old as law itself. It is the age-old recognition of the truth that individuals are accountable to their fellow-men for their conduct, including the way in which they utilize the land. Governments are always very careful about exercising the right of Eminent Domain, and it has never been a threat to the private ownership of property. On the contrary, it is such a sovereignty as this of the organized democratic State that makes private property possible at all; without such authority we would be living in chaos.

The fact of Stewardship makes us pause to reflect on the meaning of the phrase: "the sacredness of private property." In what sense is private property sacred? Does it mean that my right to do what I like with my own is a sacred right and that for anyone to challenge that right would be contrary to the laws of God? It does mean this. It means that I, as a child of God, claim "the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and that in so far as my possessions are essential to my life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, I can claim the protection of the laws of God and man; but the "sacredness of private property" means something more: it means that property--of every kind--is a sacred trust, and that I am under a solemn obligation to use it as such--to the glory of God and the good of mankind. Think of what the farmer means to the world. Men depend upon him for their food. Is that not a sacred responsibility? "The surface of the earth is particularly within the care of the farmer. He keeps it for his own sustenance and gain, but his gain is also the gain of all the rest of us. At the best, he accumulates little to himself. The successful farmer is the one who produces more than he needs for his support; and the overplus he does not keep; and moreover, his own needs are early satisfied. It is of the utmost consequence that the man next the earth shall lead a fair and simple life, for in riotous living he might halt many good supplies that go now to his fellows. He must exercise his dominion with due regard to all these obligations. He is a trustee. The productiveness of the earth must increase from generation to

generation: this also is his obligation. He must handle all his materials, remembering man and remembering God." (L. H. Bailey: "The Holy Earth.") Notice how this applies to the matter of conservation, for conservation means the utilization of the land in the best interests of all. To waste or abuse land or to rob it of its fertility and productiveness is, in plain English, to sin against God and man.

This doctrine of Stewardship goes deeply into our life. It dominates the Bible's view of man's relation to the land and all other forms of property. Behind the practice of tithing was the idea of Stewardship. According to the Old Testament law (Leviticus 27:30), a tithe, that is, one-tenth, of all the products of the land was to be considered "holy unto the Lord." This means that one-tenth of every man's produce was set aside or consecrated to God, that is, it was used for the support of the worship of God in the maintenance of the sanctuary and the priesthood. This was not considered an exaction or tax levied by the priests, but as a return to God of a part of what He had given in recognition that everything was His and as a symbol of the self-dedication of the giver.

"We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee."

"May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive,
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,
To Thee our firstfruits give."
(The Hymnary, 374.)

Do we really mean it when we sing this hymn? The practice of tithing has all but disappeared, partly perhaps because it is not encouraged by any explicit New Testament teaching. Jesus said nothing about tithing, no doubt because he took the practice for granted, but he said a great deal about Stewardship. In the background of all his teaching lay this thought of man's final and absolute responsibility to God. Quite frequently Jesus spoke of men as the servants, or Stewards, of God, and many of His sayings directly involve the thought of Stewardship. (See St. Luke 12:43; 16:10, 12; 17:10; St. Matthew 25:23.) It was the thought of Stewardship that lay behind His teaching about giving. "Freely ye have received," He said, "freely give." (St. Luke 10:8; see also St. Matthew 5:42; St. Luke 6:38; 11:41.) There can be little doubt that the motive of Stewardship has largely fallen out of our giving. The Offering in Public Worship is seldom thought of any longer as a real "offering"—an oblation, a sacrifice, a costly gift freely rendered to God; it is now the "collection"—something collected or taken! It is thought of only too often merely as a means of "paying" the preacher." The truth is that the Offering is, or ought to be, the most solemn act of Public Worship. It is the climax of the service, for it is, as we said a moment ago, the return to God of a part of what He has given us, in recognition that everything comes from Him and belongs to Him. The Offering is not only the symbol of our self-dedication to God; it is our self-dedication to Him, because there we are freely rendering to Him of our substance at cost to ourselves for the realization of His purpose through the Church! The climax of the most sacred act of the Church's worship comes with the words: "And here we offer and present unto Thee, O God, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto Thee."

It should be clear now how deeply this doctrine of Stewardship goes. It means, finally, that my life itself belongs to God. "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God," prayed St. Augustine. In simple English this means that I am not my own; I belong to God. The offering God wants most of all is the offering of myself. Without this self-dedication to Him all other gifts are empty and life itself is vanity. "Thy will be done." This prayer which Jesus taught His disciples to say is for grace to render that humble surrender, sincere devotion, and reverent service which finds the deepest meaning and realizes the deepest satisfaction which life has to offer. For it looks beyond earthy life to that perfect service where we shall find perfect freedom.

So much does Stewardship mean! We began by talking about a man's relation to the land, and we find ourselves talking about man's eternal salvation. And they are connected! We can only be good stewards of the land or of anything else, if we are conscious of our dependence upon God, and realize that we are fellow-workers together with Him, and give ourselves to Him with all our hearts to be used by Him in the accomplishment of His eternal purpose.

No man is so placed as the farmer to know what Stewardship means. All men in their callings are Stewards, but because of the farmer's intimacy with the elemental forces of nature, his sense of dependence upon God, and because of the importance of the trust put in him both by God and his fellow-men, he needs to cultivate Stewardship more than other men. Here, then, is one of the spiritual values of special concern to those who care about the rural way of life. Our rural way of life depends on a lively sense of Stewardship.

Spiritual Values: 2. Fellowship

Fellowship is the New Testament word for Friendship--friendship with God and man. Christianity is a life of Friendship or Fellowship because it is a religion of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," said Jesus, "with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (St. Matthew 22:34-40.) It must be observed that Jesus places these two commandments in a specific order. One is "the first and great commandment," and the other is "like unto it." In other words, the one is primary and basic, the other is derivative. Without the first the second is impossible, and without the second the first is unreal. Fellowship with men--on the Christian level--is possible only in and through Fellowship with God. This spiritual value we have called Fellowship is, as we said earlier, a "fruit of the Spirit." It is created by God's Spirit at work in us; it is supernatural rather than natural. And this means that true fellowship is born in our lives as we worship God together. We shall be more directly concerned in the next chapter with this matter of worship; here we are to think about our Fellowship with one another under two headings: The Family and the Community.

Fellowship: 1. The Family

The family is the most natural of all social groupings. In the family Fellowship is completely spontaneous. Fellowship may seem the wrong word to apply, since we defined Fellowship as friendship, and we feel that a much stronger word is necessary to describe the spiritual bond that unites the members of a family. We prefer to call it love or affection. However, the fundamental idea is that there is a bond of unity which is more than feeling. The love of the members of a family goes much deeper than mere feeling; there is an identity of interest among them, a strong loyalty and selflessness rarely found outside the family. And this is natural--or, should we say here again that it is supernatural? Yes, we should, for the family has a divine (or supernatural) origin. The family is an institution ordained by God, that is, it has a divine purpose. The purpose of the family is "the fulfilling and perfecting of the love of man and woman," which is normally realized in "the procreation of children to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord." Jesus spoke of a husband and wife as "no more twain but one flesh"; they are united not merely by instinct and the need for "mutual society, help and comfort," though these factors are, and ought to be, present, but they are united also by their common acceptance of the purpose of God. When family life is thus grounded firmly on the purpose of God which it was intended to fulfil then the true Fellowship of the family is realized.

God's purpose for the family is not only the begetting of children, but also their development, training and education. The human being matures very slowly, and therefore requires a home and the attention and care of its parents over a very long period. Let us consider some of the factors which are involved in the provision of a home for the family, especially the rural family. We shall be thinking here not only of the obligations and responsibilities involved in the raising of a family, but also of the special privileges and advantages enjoyed by the farm family.

A. First of all, a good home requires religion. As we have already pointed out, the family exists for a divine purpose, and if it is to fulfil that purpose its members will have to find their inspiration in and through Christian faith, hope and love. The love, fidelity and loyalty without which the family cannot exist at all are rooted deep in our recognition of the love of God that passeth understanding. The family cannot have unity unless that unity is established through common worship. Men and women in families or otherwise can be one only in Christ; only Jesus Christ can really unite people, give them a common purpose and harmonize their points of view, their attitudes and their dispositions. Without unity a family is hopelessly lost; and without common worship real unity is impossible. There is a kind of unity that is possible without worship, but it is a dead, negative unity, the mere absence of conflict and discord. The unity we mean is a vital, creative unity, one that results in productive work and the building of Christian character. The unity of the family does not mean that there will be only one point of view, that the members never differ with each other, that there will never be any tension, or that tempers are never tried. It means that deep underneath these differences there is a fundamental harmony born of the consciousness of belonging together under the hand of God the Father.

Well what is involved, then, in this "common worship," by which we mean simply worship together? It means first that the family will worship as a unit in the home. And let it be said here that whatever difficulties there may be in carrying out family worship, the rural family is in a very advantageous position. The family is usually all at home at some time of the day; and this cannot be said of the city family. And there are not likely to be any interruptions, especially after breakfast. In family worship the husband and father is "the minister," reading the Bible (preferably in some kind of order from day to day) and leading in prayer. Prayer may be difficult for some, but family worship would be quite complete with Bible reading and the saying of the Lord's Prayer together.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this kind of worship for family life.

"Compared to this, how poor Religion's pride,
In all the pomp of method and of art;
When men display to congregations wide
Devotion's ev'ry grace except the heart!"

So wrote Burns of family worship, and concluded:

"From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad."

Family worship sanctifies the home; it provides a wholesome spiritual atmosphere for home life; it trains children to worship and makes Christian faith and conduct a natural part of daily life instead of a special activity reserved for Sunday and Church. It is such worship that provides the general tone of life. There will, however, be another mode of common worship for the family. They will join with the neighbours on Sunday at Church. We are to discuss the Church in the next chapter, and here we are concerned to point out only that Public Worship is an activity for the whole family. Far too many parents send their children to Sunday School but take no responsibility about their attendance at Church, even when they--the parents--go themselves. There are two matters of great seriousness here: First, parents only too often hand over the religious education of their children to the Sunday School and feel that they are doing their duty to the full if they keep them attending regularly. This is a mistake. The Sunday School was never intended to relieve parents of the task of teaching their children about God. One writer goes so far as to say: "a child who has learned about God from anyone but his parents has been done an injustice for which nothing in life can ever quite atone." That does not mean that no one else should ever give

child religious instruction. It does mean that any religious instruction given by any other person than a parent in any other place than the home should be merely supplementary. The home should strive to make the Sunday School unnecessary. Second, the Sunday School was never intended to take the place of the Church for children any more than it was intended to take the place of the home. Let us repeat: Church is for the whole family, and the whole family belongs in Church.

B. The family is the foundation of all social life; the family, not the individual, is the primary social unit. In the case of the rural family we can go further and say that it is an economic, as well as a social unit. Farming is a family enterprise. In the city children are an economic liability; in the country they are an economic asset. It is a matter of the greatest importance that children on the farm have their work to do at an early age, and that they grow into co-operative and productive work naturally. This means that very early in life the farm boy and girl learns to take responsibility, to develop initiative, to take pride in work well done and in having something of good quality to show for his or her labour. Perhaps this is an ideal, rather than an actual, state of affairs, but the point is that on the farm this is possible, and it is not possible to the same degree anywhere else. That is why we say that the farm family is the foundation of society. The farm family is the ideal place for the practical lessons of life to be learned. That is the reason why the rural areas are able to produce a nation's leaders, in spite of some of the well-known disadvantages of country life. The cities depend on the country to maintain their population. It is a known fact that the birthrate in modern cities is not high enough to compensate for losses in population due to deaths, while in the country the birthrate is more than high enough to maintain an adequate farm population. The farms of a nation not only have to feed the cities, but to provide them with people as well! So much depends on the farm family, then, that its welfare ought to be the concern of the whole nation. One writer puts it this way: "We honour farming as a way of life, because agriculture provides the best setting for the home, because it encourages home virtues, makes for stability and purity of family life, the foundation upon which society is built, the means by which the individual receives the best start in any form of life that he may later embrace, and that proves itself the best form of life for the majority of human beings."

If the farm family is to produce the kind of men and women society expects from it, then it must have security. We have already discussed this matter in Chapter IV, and what we said there need not be repeated. The farm provides the opportunities for the finest family life and all that that involves. "It is becoming clear," says an authority, "that the land is the foundation of the family and that the family is the foundation of the State." If that is so, the two great questions are: Will society provide the conditions necessary to the security of the farm family? And, if they have such security, will rural people take advantage of their opportunities?

Fellowship: 2. The Community

The Bulgarian peasants have two sayings with which Canadian farmers will heartily agree: "Without neighbours, nothing is possible," and "God help those who have bad neighbours." The friendliness and neighbourliness of farm people are proverbial. They know the joys and advantages of living in peace and mutual helpfulness with their neighbours and they realize how dull, difficult and wretched life on the farm would be without them. What is more, this kind of neighbourliness is possible only on the farm. In the city a man knows few, if any, of his neighbours, and he probably doesn't care to know them. He has one set of neighbours (whom he may never speak to) at home, another set at the office or factory, a third set at the church, a fourth at his club or lodge, and then his closest friends--the people he invites to his home for dinner and bridge--may be people he has met quite casually in none of these places. How different it is in the country! There a man's friends, his neighbours, his fellow-workers, his fellow-Church-members are all the same people! In the city real community life is impossible. The word "community" is a rich word. It contains the word "common," which suggests that a community is a group of people who have something in common. It contains also the word "unity," which suggests that a community is a group of people who are united. Both words, of course, really suggest the same thing: a community is a group of people who are united by what they have in common. Farm people have almost everything in common and have, therefore, the real basis of unity.

It is just this kind of life that is the foundation of democracy. The spirit of democracy can thrive only where the sense of community--the feeling of belonging together--is strong. And if a sense of community can thrive anywhere it ought to thrive in the country where conditions are most favourable. And yet, in spite of the friendliness and neighbourliness of farm people, there is very frequently no concrete expression of the spirit of community among them. In many rural districts there is no social life. There may be casual visits among neighbours, but a rich social life in which old and young participate is becoming a thing of the past. That is the tragic truth.

There are many reasons for this. Some people blame the fact that farmers have to work too hard and too long to enjoy a social evening. This is probably no more than a very lame excuse. There are other deeper reasons. One is simply indifference. There are people who are not sociable, who have no sense of community at all, who never feel it either a privilege or a duty to participate in community life. It is appalling to note the number of people who are scarcely ever seen off their own farms. And they are not only spoiling their own lives; they are dead-weights to their community and to society in general. But this condition has a cause, and that is that the community life has never been attractive enough to draw them out of their seclusion! In other words, dead communities are unlike other dead things--they perpetuate themselves.

There are other reasons for the decline of rural community life. There is the fact that many people go to the cities and towns for their entertainment. But here again, the reason for this is that the community life has not been satisfying enough. Perhaps the greatest need of all is that of leadership. Community life requires a number of people who will lead the rest, and they must have initiative, patience and a strong sense of responsibility. One of the most noticeable features of rural community life is the way in which most people wait for some one else to start things! It is this lack of a sense of personal responsibility that accounts for the present poverty-stricken social life of the countryside. And let us make no mistake about it: the absence of a rich community life has tragic consequences. Economic prosperity will not bring happiness to rural people unless they realize also something of the spiritual value we have called Fellowship in their communities.

The community life we have been talking about does not consist merely of socials and entertainments. It is the total life of the community, and this can be rich and satisfying only if it includes working and worshipping together; its success is to be measured by the number of worth-while activities in which the whole community is interested, and for which they all feel a responsibility, by the good purposes in the realization of which all are engaged according to their abilities.

I have a friend who is convinced that so long as farmers are as intensely individualistic as they are now, a real community life will be impossible for them, that the trouble with rural life is that a farmer looks out every day over his hundred acres, fenced off from the rest of the world, and thrills to the thought that it is all his alone to do with as he likes; he believes that so long as farmers will only co-operate when it is convenient for them individually, they will have to suffer the tragic consequences. To a certain extent my friend is quite right. As long as the self is the centre of one's world, community life is impossible, and as long as the rural way of life encourages the self-centred brand of individualism, it will continue to decline. "No man is an island," said John Donne, "entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind."

There is only one remedy, and that is the Christian remedy. God alone belongs at the centre of our life, and Christian worship means centring our life in God. We can only be one in Christ. And when Christ shall have brought us together, we shall have learned what this means: "We are members one of another."

"For the Land's Sake" may be secured from any of the three Boards named in the footnote on page one: one copy, 25 cents; six copies, \$1.00.